

THACKERAY

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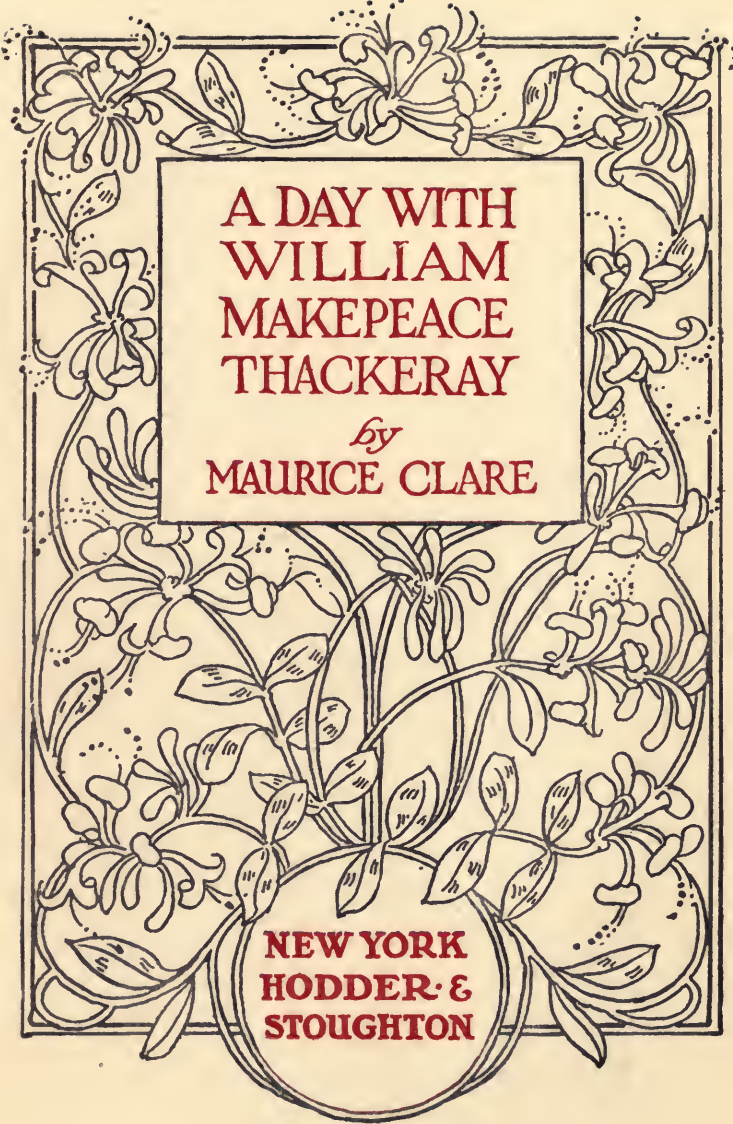


Painting by C. E. Brock.

“Say yes, Becky,” Sir Pitt continued, “. . . I’d make you a settlement. I’d do everything regular. Look yere!” And the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her . . . Rebecca started back, the picture of consternation: . . . “Oh, Sir Pitt,” she said, “Oh, Sir! I—I’m married already!”

Vanity Fair.



A decorative border of black line art surrounds the text. It features stylized flowers, possibly lilies, with long, curved petals and pointed leaves. The design is symmetrical and fills the rectangular frame of the cover.

A DAY WITH
WILLIAM
MAKEPEACE
THACKERAY

by
MAURICE CLARE

NEW YORK
HODDER &
STOUGHTON

In the same Series.

Stevenson.

Dickens.

A DAY WITH THACKERAY



It was about half-past nine o'clock, on a mild October morning in 1858, when the big, broad-shouldered, upright figure of William Makepeace Thackeray entered the breakfast room of 36, Onslow Square, and was received with affectionate greetings by his two young daughters. His large kindly face, "full of humour and human sympathy," beamed upon them across the well-furnished breakfast table, as he made good play with knife and fork; for Thackeray was never one to disdain the pleasures of eating and drinking. And indeed it needed more than "butterfly-food" to sustain that fine frame of six-foot-two, and that ceaseless fertility of brain-output which almost staggers one to contemplate. The great man was only forty-six, but appeared very much older, owing to the silvery whiteness of his short-cropped curly hair, and the spectacles through which his blue-grey eyes sent forth so keen a gaze. His massive head and face were almost anomalous on the top of such a mighty figure,

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owing to the curious air of childlike simplicity which distinguished the famous satirist, giving him, as Motley wrote, the appearance of "a colossal infant, with a roundish face, and a little dab of a nose."

He looked about him in frank and simple pleasure, surveying all with satisfaction: now glancing at the two girls, the idols of his heart, now at the comfortable appurtenances of that "pleasant bowery sort of house, with green curtains and carpets, looking out upon the elm-trees" (Lady Ritchie), which was perhaps the most desirable of all the many dwellings he had occupied. Finally, having finished his meal, he lighted a cigar and took up a comfortable attitude and a morning paper. For this man, who had in his youth struggled so strenuously and unavailingly,—who, ten years before this, was an obscure writer for reviews and magazines, barely eking out a difficult hand-to-mouth existence,—had now arrived at the zenith of a hard-earned fame. And he was recouping himself with a full hand for all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune which had been showered upon him in those bygone days. He made money, so to speak, lavishly (although he bitterly complained that five copies of each Dickens'

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book were sold to one of his), and he spent it lavishly—on himself and other people. “No man,” it has been said, “was ever so much improved by success,” and the success carried with it the unusual traits of a large heart, an open hand, an incalculable capacity for charitable deeds. But he liked to maintain a high standard of home and personal comfort: he thoroughly enjoyed the possession of a big house, a good wine-cellar, a man-servant, a riding horse, a brougham, — all that tends towards, without actually verging into, luxury. And “he preferred to work double shifts to the end of his days” to keep up this desirable state of things.

Presently, with a sigh, the big man roused himself and went into his study. A slight expression of distaste crossed his face as his eye fell upon the evidences of work which thronged the desk, and the vast accumulation of letters piled upon it. “I write at the rate of 5,000 letters a year,” he had told a friend, and probably this estimate did not include the letters he personally dictated—much less the correspondence which he had to peruse. For the writing and reading of epistolary MS. is, to a literary man, not only an inevitable evil, but a most pernicious waste of time. And Thackeray was not

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an enthusiastic penman : he avowed himself naturally indolent. "I work only from necessity," he said, "I never take up the pen without an effort." This effort was continuous ; "for, as the sheets went from him each day, he told himself with regard to each sheet, that it was a failure." (Anthony Trollope.) "The great thing is to make no sentence without a meaning to it,"—that was his principle : and he would revise his work continuously, from first MS. to second edition, re-writing whole pages and substituting simple words for longer ones. "There were times," it has been said, "when he almost hated the chain that held him to the desk."

But to-day he was absolutely debarred from a long session at that irksome piece of furniture, by the effects of a recent severe illness. His amanuensis, George Hodder, was already waiting to play the scribe at his dictation : a pleasant task, for, as Hodder himself declared, those who knew Thackeray best, loved him best : and the society of that "heartly and very human" man, with his charm of pleasant courtesy and placid temper, was in itself a perpetual delight.

The novelist paced to and fro, smoking whilst he dictated. Sometimes he found the

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noises of the street too harassing, and adjourned from his study to his bedroom : sometimes he sat down a moment, or even lay down a little while. To make a beginning of work, that was his great difficulty : once he fairly got into his stride, things went more easily. But his style, " which is more like the result of thinking aloud than the style of any other writer," is the correlative of his peculiar want of method : which showed most evidently in the construction of his stories. The fact is, they were *not* constructed, in the ordinary sense of the word. He would create a few principal characters, and then leave them to make the running, with no very clear idea as to their possible course. " I don't control my characters," he said, " I am in their hands, and they take me where they please . . . I have been surprised at the observations made by some of my characters. It seems as if an occult power were moving the pen. The person says or does something, and I ask, how did he come to think of that ? "

At present, however, the characters needed a little management and careful manipulation,—even if they did not always get it. For Thackeray was very fully occupied with the fortunes of the house of Esmond-Warrington,

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as set forth in *The Virginians*. If the notorious ill-success of a sequel were dogging the author's steps, almost as a foregone conclusion, all throughout this book, one might contend that it would be a hard task for any sequel to parallel the strength, interest, and sustained historical dignity of its predecessor *Esmond*. "Never could I have believed," declared Walter Savage Landor, "that Thackeray, great as his abilities are, could have written so noble a story as *Esmond*." And never could any man have believed that, in his remorseless regard for truth as he saw it, the novelist would permit the Baroness de Bernstein, the raddled old woman, "tired of most things and most people, . . . nodding and sleeping over the Chaplain's stories, . . . a stout, high-coloured old lady, with a very dark pair of eyes," to be identified as the wreck of that magnificent Beatrix, who moved in sinister splendour through the stately pages of *Esmond*. There is, perhaps, no such masterly picture of any woman, in any tale, as that which introduces and sums up this glorious creature.

"In the hall of Walcote House, . . . is a staircase that leads from an open gallery, where are the doors of the sleeping chambers :

Painting by C. E. Brock.

In the hall of Walcote House is a staircase that leads from an open gallery, where are the doors of the sleeping chambers: and from one of these, a wax candle in her hand, and illuminating her, came Mistress Beatrix—the light falling indeed upon the scarlet ribbon which she wore, and upon the most brilliant white neck in the world . . . So she came, holding her dress with one fair rounded arm, and her taper before her, tripping down the stairs to greet Esmond.

Esmond.



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and from one of these, a wax candle in her hand, and illuminating her, came Mistress Beatrix,—the light falling indeed upon the scarlet ribbon which she wore, and upon the most brilliant white neck in the world. Esmond had left a child, and found a woman, grown beyond her common height: and arrived at such a dazzling completeness of beauty, that his eyes might well show surprise and delight at beholding her. In hers, there was a brightness so lustrous and melting, that I have seen a whole assembly follow her as if by an attraction irresistible. . . She was a brown beauty: that is, her eyes, hair, and eyebrows and eyelashes were dark: her hair curling with rich undulations, and waving over her shoulders: but her complexion was as dazzling white as snow in sunshine, except her cheeks, which were a bright red, and her lips, which were of a still deeper crimson. Her mouth and chin, they said, were too large and full, and so they might be for a goddess in marble, but not for a woman whose eyes were fire, whose look was love, whose voice was the sweetest love song, whose shape was perfect symmetry, health, decision, activity, whose foot, as it planted itself in the ground, was firm but flexible, and whose motion, whether

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rapid or slow, was always perfect grace—agile as a nymph, lofty as a queen—now melting, now imperious, now sarcastic,—there was no single movement of hers but was beautiful . . . So she came, holding her dress with one fair, rounded arm, and her taper before her, tripping down the stairs to greet Esmond.”

(*Esmond.*)

After this, to be confronted with Madam Bernstein is a case of *Vanitas Vanitatum* with a vengeance : and Thackeray himself felt this, as he more or less reluctantly dictated sheet after sheet of *The Virginians*.

Finally, in a sudden fit of impatience, “That’s enough, George,” he cried, “I can write anywhere better than at home. I cannot work comfortably here in my own room. There is an excitement in public places that sets my brain working : and here it goes like a creaking wheel. I must work at high pressure, or not at all. Let us run through the letters, and then—well, then I think I must take the children for a run.”

The “children,” the “little girls,” as they always were to their father, were now young women. They were doubly dear to him,—for their own sake, and for that of their mother, to

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whose loss he could never become reconciled, for it was a loss by far worse than death. After only four years of happy married life, Mrs. Thackeray's intellect had become irrevocably clouded, and for forty years she remained shut away in seclusion. No gleam of hope ever penetrated, for her husband, the sadness of this lame and impotent conclusion to all the happy visions which had once been his. Only an infinite sadness, a sense of futility in things terrestrial, grew more manifest in his writings as the years went on, and the charming young Irish wife became a poignant memory.

“Ah! me! how quick the days are flitting!

I mind me of a time that's gone,

When here I'd sit, as now I'm sitting

In this same place—but not alone.

A fair young form was nestled near me,

A dear, dear face looked fondly up,

And sweetly spoke, and smiled to cheer me—

There's no one now to share my cup.”

(Ballad of Bouillabaisse.)

But, for her sake, he had a peculiar leaning towards the Irish: “I hear,” a man said to him, “you have written a book upon Ireland, and are always making fun of the Irish. You don't like us.” Thackeray replied, his head

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turned away, and his eyes filling with tears, "God help me! all that I have loved best in the world is Irish." And you may notice that, in dealing with an Irishman, he always treats him tenderly, "lets him down easy," makes every excuse for his shortcomings. From Captain Shandon in *Pendennis*, "one of the wittiest, the most amiable . . . and the most incorrigible of Irishmen. Nobody could help liking Charley Shandon who saw him once, and those whom he ruined could hardly be angry with him," to Jack Finucane of the *Pall Mall Gazette*,—and the dare-devil scoundrel Barry Lyndon,—last, not least, to Captain Costigan, in whose "whiskied blood there was not a bad drop, nor in his muddled brains a bitter feeling against any mortal soul,"—the characteristic Hibernian traits are ruthlessly yet lovingly sketched. And for Captain Costigan, his author had evidently a special kindness: he crops up continually through various novels, always further downhill and down-at-heel, always with a relic of his old jauntiness,—a suggestion of tenderness, when "rakish and shabby . . . brave and maudlin, humorous and an idiot, always goodnatured and sometimes almost trustworthy," he enter-

Painting by C. E. Brock.

Sometimes the Captain was present at their meetings, but having a perfect confidence in his daughter, he was more often inclined to leave the young couple to themselves, and cocked his hat over his eye, and strutted off on some excuse when Pen entered The Captain's drawing-room was a low-wainscoted room with a large window looking into the Dean's garden. There Pen sate and talked—talked to Emily, looking beautiful as she sate at her work.

Pendennis.



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tained, for his daughter's sake, the infatuated Master Arthur Pendennis.

“Sometimes the Captain was present at their meetings ; but, having a perfect confidence in his daughter, he was more often inclined to leave the young couple to themselves, and cocked his hat over his eye, and strutted off on some excuse when Pen entered. How delightful those interviews were. The Captain's drawing room was a low wainscoted room with a large window looking into the Dean's garden. There Pen sate and talked—talked to Emily, looking beautiful as she sate at her work, looking beautiful and calm, and the sunshine came streaming in at the great window, and lighted up her superb face and form.”

(*Pendennis.*)

But the most admirable child of Erin that ever Thackeray loved to linger over, was Mrs. O'Dowd in *Vanity Fair*: whose behaviour on the eve of Waterloo was so unique. He loved to detail every accent, every idiom, of the inimitable Peggy, *née* Maloney.

“ ‘I'd like ye to wake me about half an hour before the assembly beats,’ the Major said to his lady. ‘Call me at half-past one, Peggy, dear, and see me things is ready. Maybe I'll

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not come back to breakfast, Mrs. O'D.' With which words, which signified his opinion that the regiment would march the next morning, the Major ceased talking, and fell asleep.

“Mrs. O’Dowd, the good housewife, arrayed in curl-papers and a camisole, felt that her duty was to act, and not to sleep, at this juncture. ‘Time enough for that,’ she said, ‘when Mick’s gone.’ So she packed his travelling valise ready for the march, brushed his cloak, his cap, and other warlike habiliments, set them out in order for him, and stowed away in the cloak pockets a light package of portable refreshments, and a wicker-covered flask or pocket-pistol containing near a pint of a remarkably sound Cognac brandy, of which she and the Major approved very much; and as soon as the hands of the ‘repayther’ pointed to half-past one, and its interior arrangements (it had a tone quite equal to a Cathaydral, its fair owner considered) knelled forth that fatal hour, Mrs. O’Dowd woke up her Major, and has as comfortable a cup of coffee prepared for him as any made that morning in Brussels . . . The consequence was, that the Major appeared on parade quite trim, fresh and alert, his well-shaved rosy countenance, as he sat on horse-

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back, giving cheerfulness and confidence to the whole corps. All the officers saluted her when the regiment marched by the balcony on which this brave woman stood, and waved them a cheer as they passed : and I daresay it was not from want of courage, but from a sense of female delicacy and propriety, that she refrained from leading the gallant —th personally into action.”

(*Vanity Fair.*)

Thackeray's next move, this morning, was to “take the little girls for a run,” as he had phrased it : and they unanimously decided in favour of Kensington Gardens, a district which never palls upon its devotees. The trees were already assuming their autumnal tints, the “*roses d'Octobre*” were few and far between : but the Gardens and the Broad Walk were fairly alive with children, and the Round Pond was all a-flicker with sails. The great author's countenance became transfused with the warmest pleasure. He had an intense and extraordinary love for children. He rejoiced in playing with them, in taking them to the pantomime, in drawing funny pictures to make them laugh.

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“Caricatures I scribbled have, and rhymes,
And dinner cards, and picture-pantomimes,
And many little children’s books at times.”

Fields, the American publisher, had once been invited to accompany him to St. Paul’s, “and hear the Charity Children sing . . . the greatest sight in London.” . . . “And I saw,” said Fields subsequently, “the head cynic of literature, the hater of humanity” (as the *Times* had termed him), “hiding his bowed head wet with tears, while his whole frame shook with emotion.”

But above all he was passionately attached to boys. “I always,” said he, “give boys beef-steaks and apricot omelettes.” He was consumed by a perpetual desire to provide them with little treats, to act the Fairy Godfather to boys all and sundry: and the little ones especially found their way into his genial heart. Thackeray always speaks of little boys with a singular fatherly tenderness, as though each had been his own,—as though he had held the little warm sticky hands in his, and had personally known and sympathised with all the transient joys and sorrows of small-boyhood. For instances of this, you have only to remember little Georgy in *Vanity Fair*,—and

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little Rawdon, for whom the big Dragoon his father had such a "great secret tenderness," his one redeeming spot; and little Harry Esmond—and little Denny Duval—and the boys of *Dr. Birch's School*—they are beyond naming or numbering: and all of them drawn with the truth and skill which only love can give. As for *The Newcomes*, it is, one may say, a chronicle of little boys—from Tommy, afterwards the Colonel, to Clivey, his son, and *his* son Boy, in later chapters—down to the "little laughing red-cheeked white-headed gown-boy," who talks cricket to the Colonel on his death-bed.

When Thackeray and his daughters at length quitted the Gardens, he bade them farewell and turned Westward; his brougham was waiting in the High Street to take him to the Athenæum Club. There, at a quiet table, he would proceed to cover a few slips of paper, but erratically and with no very fixed purpose of work. "My Pegasus has no wings," he complained, "he is blind of one eye certainly. He is restive, stubborn, slow: crops a hedge when he ought to be galloping, or gallops when he ought to be quiet. He will never show off when I want him. . . I am obliged to let him

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take his time." But printers cannot be kept waiting: publishers are insistent people: and Thackeray's happy-go-lucky, hand-to-mouth manner of supplying the demand, "than which," as Motley wrote, "I can conceive nothing more harassing in a literary way"—was probably at once the cause and effect of his somewhat loose and casual constructive methods.

At the clubs, however, although a room was sometimes placed entirely at his disposal, he was liable to all sorts of digressions and divergences from his work—easily tempted to go for a walk, or to join an interesting conversation, or to stand in the smoking-room with his back to the fire and his hands in his trouser pockets, enjoying an animated *causerie* with his friends. Unquestionably he picked up a great deal of material for his tales through current club-gossip. He repudiated, however, the charge of drawing his characters from life—although many parts of *Pendennis* are undeniably autobiographical: and declared that Sir Pitt Crawley was the only exact portrait in *Vanity Fair*—"that old, stumpy, short, vulgar, and very dirty man," as Becky Sharp described him, "in old clothes, and shabby old gaiters, who smokes a horrid pipe, and cooks his own horrid supper in

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a saucepan." The Hampshire vernacular of Sir Pitt, that "philosopher with a taste for low life," has certainly considerable *vraisemblance* about it: and who that ever read it can forget the episode of his proposal to Becky?

"'I want you back at Queen's Crawley, Miss,' the Baronet said, fixing his eyes upon her, and taking off his black gloves, and his hat with its great black hat-band. His eyes had such a strange look, and fixed upon her so steadfastly, that Rebecca Sharp began almost to tremble. . . 'Come as Lady Crawley, if you like,' the Baronet said, grasping his crape hat, 'There, will that satisfy you? Come back and be my wife. You're vit vor't. Birth be hanged. You're as good a lady as ever I see. You've got more brains in your little finger than any baronet's wife in the county. Will you come? Yes or no?' 'Oh, Sir Pitt!' Rebecca said, very much moved. 'Say yes, Becky,' Sir Pitt continued. 'I am an old man, but a good man. I'm good for twenty years. I will make you happy—you shall do what you like, spend what you like, and 'av it all your own way. I'll make you a zettlement. I'll do everything reg'lar. Look yere!'—and the old man fell down on his knees, and leered at her like a satyr."

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“Rebecca started back, the picture of consternation. In the course of this history we have never seen her lose her presence of mind; but she did now, and wept some of the most genuine tears that could fall from her eyes. ‘Oh, Sir Pitt,’ she said, ‘Oh, Sir, I—I—I—I— I’m married already.’”

(*Vanity Fair.*)

But *Vanity Fair*, “assured of immortality as ninety-nine hundredths of modern novels are sure of annihilation,” requires no factitious aid of avowed studies-from-the-life to enhance its marvellous veracities. It is the epitome of Thackeray’s theory of work,—of that absolute devotion to truth which was his whole plan of action. “All is true in Thackeray,” said Charlotte Brontë (who by no means worshipped blindly): “If Truth were again a goddess, Thackeray should be her high priest.” And as he put it himself:

“I cannot help telling the truth as I find it, and describing what I see. To describe it otherwise than it seems, seems to me, would be falsehood in that calling in which it has pleased heaven to place me: treason to that conscience which says that men are weak: that truth must be told: that faults must be owned: that pardon

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must be paid for : and that Love reigns supreme over all."

(Charity and Humour.)

It is this inherent truth to types which is the vital essence of his work. He shows no man, no woman, wholly bad or wholly good, but endeavours to demonstrate "that love and truth are the greatest of heaven's commandments and blessings to us : that the best of us, the many especially who pride themselves on their virtue, are wretchedly weak, vain and selfish : and to preach such a charity at least as a common sense of our shame and unworthiness might inspire . . . "

In short, he never lost sight of the fact that even in the worst, the most hardened, the most degraded,—“ O joy, that in our embers is something that doth live ! ”—burns some smoulder of celestial fire.

Lunch at the Athenæum over, the novelist would stroll on to the Garrick and perhaps indite a few more pages there : perhaps dip into one or two current magazines or new books. He preferred such stories as took a kindly, optimistic view of life ; for “ Love,” he had written, “ is a higher intellectual exercise than Hatred,” and he found “ unhappy endings” absolutely

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unbearable. His own personal predilections lay largely with the great eighteenth-century romancists — Fielding, Smollett, Steele, and Goldsmith; but his favourite authors were Scott and Dumas. He was kindled to enthusiasm by the sight of books *en masse*, as in the British Museum, where he had formerly worked so often :

“That catholic dome in Bloomsbury, what truth, what beauty, what happiness for all, what generous kindness for you and me are here spread out ! It seems to me one cannot sit down in that place without a heart full of grateful reverence. I own to have said my grace at the table, and to have thanked Heaven for this my English birthright, freely to partake of the bountiful books, and speak the truth I find there.”

(Nil nisi Bonum.)

For Thackeray took his work very seriously, though his methods of doing it were so haphazard.

“The humorous writer,” he remarked, “professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness, your sense of untruth, pretension, imposture ; your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy . .

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He takes upon himself to be the week-day preacher, so to speak."

(*English Humorists.*)

And he held his profession as a stewardship. He had prayed that he "might never write a word inconsistent with the love of God or with his love of man ;" and again :

"To do your work honestly, to amuse and instruct your reader of to-day, to die when your time comes, and go hence with as clean a breast as may—may all these be yours and ours by God's will !"

(*The Chances of the Literary Profession.*)

"With regard to religion," he wrote on another occasion, "I think, please God, my books are written by a God-loving man, and the morality, the vanity of success, etc.,—of all but love and goodness"—is not that the teaching *Domini nostri* ?

That *The Newcomes* was assailed by the *Times* on the grounds of morality and religion, seems now an inconceivable thing. For assuredly no more lofty-minded and lovable character than the Colonel figures in the whole vast realm of English romance. Of the many old men with whose "counterfeit presentments" Thackeray was so signally successful, Colonel

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Newcome remains for all time the model of an intrinsic gentleman, just as Lord Steyne is the eternally irredeemable blackguard. He is the very incarnation of the novelist's own lines :—

“Come wealth or want, come good or ill,
Let young and old accept their part,
And bow before the Awful Will,
And bear it with an honest heart.
Who misses, or who wins the prize?
Go, lose or conquer as you can ;
But if you fail, or if you rise,
Be each, pray God, a gentleman.”

And from the time when, with Pendennis, we discover him patiently fallen upon adversity:

“Yonder sit some two-score old gentlemen pensioners of the hospital, listening to the prayers and the psalms. You hear them coughing feebly in the twilight—the old revered blackgowns, and amongst them sat Thomas Newcome. His dear old head was bent down over his prayer-book. He wore the black gown of the pensioners of the hospital of Grey Friars. His Order of the Bath was on his breast. He stood there amongst the poor brethren, uttering the responses to the psalms. The steps of this good man had been ordered by Heaven's

Painting by C. E. Brock.

Old and weazened as that piano is, feeble and cracked her voice, it is wonderful what a pleasant concert she can give in that parlour of a Saturday evening, to a lad who listens with all his soul—with tears sometimes in his great eyes, with crowding fancies filling his brain and throbbing at his heart, as the artist plies her humble instrument.

The Newcomes.



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decree—to this Almshouse! Here it was ordained that a life all love and kindness and honour should end.”

(The Newcomes.)

to that last great scene in which Thackeray's voice, as he read it aloud to Lowell from his MS., broke on a sob and the tears ran down his face—Colonel Newcome is absolute master of our sympathy and our emotions. In all the language, there is no such death-scene for utter and most touching simplicity.

“His mind was gone at intervals, but would rally feebly, and with his consciousness returned his love, his simplicity, his sweetness. He would talk French with Madame de Florac, at which time his memory appeared to awaken with surprising vividness; his cheek flushed and he was a youth again, a youth all hope and love—a stricken old man, with a beard as white as snow covering his careworn face. At such times he called her by her Christian name of Léonore. He addressed courtly old words of regard and kindness to this aged lady. Anon, he wandered in his thoughts, and spoke to her as if they were still young . . . At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll, and Thomas Newcome's hands outside the bed

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feebly beat time. And just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his hand a little, and quickly said 'Adsum'—and fell back. It was the word we used at school when names were called, and lo ! he, whose heart was that of a little child, had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of the Master."

(The Newcomes.)

As many interruptions would occur at the Garrick as at the Athenæum. Some friend would bring a tale of distress to pour into the sympathetic ear of Thackeray ; for to be in trouble was a sure passport to his heart. "His charity was only bounded by his means." There might be some struggling artist to be helped ; some ailing man of letters to be tided over hard times. The great novelist did not hold himself aloof in Olympian disdain ; on the contrary : "Open-handed and kind-hearted, he had not an overweening opinion of his literary consequence, and he was generous as regards the people whom the world chose to call his rivals." (Locker Lampson.)

And he had a particular kindness towards the threadbare denizens of Bohemia, "a land over which hangs an endless fog, occasioned by

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much tobacco . . . a land where men call each other by their Christian names, where most are old, where almost all are young . . . I have lost my way to Bohemia now, but it is certain that Prague is the most delightful city in the world." And the glamour of the Quartier Latin had never wholly faded. "I like what are called Bohemians and fellows of that sort," he averred, "I have seen all sorts of society — dukes, duchesses, lords and ladies, authors, actors and painters; and, taken altogether, I think I like painters the best."

An artist, in literature, to his finger-tips, he still hankered after the tools of a former trade, and was always exceedingly desirous to portray his *dramatis personæ* with his pencil as well as with his pen. For, if the truth be told, he infinitely preferred the former implement, and was always only too ready to forsake the desk for the drawing-board. His early attempts as an artist had been—frankly—failures; and it is small wonder that when, as a young man of twenty-five, he went with a few drawings to Dickens in the hope of being employed to illustrate *Pickwick*, he was met with a point-blank refusal. But he had acquired an unconventional knowledge of art, and an intimate

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acquaintance with the inside of studios, which stood him in good stead all through life. And if the illustrations to his own books, which he produced with such facile profusion, were not very great from a technical standpoint ; still, to quote Charlotte Brontë : “Thackeray’s rude, careless sketches were preferable to thousands of carefully finished paintings, in their quaint humour and charm.” With the increasing influx of work which thronged upon him, however, he became at length unable to undertake illustration ; and had formally, in *The Newcomes*, abandoned the attempt. “I have turned away one artist,” he wrote of himself, “the poor creature was utterly incapable to depict the sublime, peaceful and pathetic personages and events with which this history will most assuredly abound, and I doubt whether the designer engaged in his place can make such a portrait of Miss Ethel Newcome as will satisfy her friends and her own sense of justice.”

Yet one wonders if the magical power of words to create and re-create scenes and even sounds, were ever better exemplified than in certain passages of *The Newcomes* : that, for instance, where Thackeray’s intense enjoyment of good music found expression in the vista of

Painting by C. E. Brock.

His dear old head was bent down over his prayer-book. He wore the black gown of the pensioners of the Hospital of Grey Friars. His Order of the Bath was on his breast. He stood there amongst the poor brethren, uttering the responses to the psalms. The steps of this good man had been ordered hither by Heaven's decree—to this Almshouse!

The Newcomes.



C. E. Brock 1910

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dreams down which the boy-artist, "J. J.," is beckoned, while the little old daily governess, Miss Cann, plays to him on her cracked piano :

"Old and weazened as that piano is, feeble and cracked her voice, it is wonderful what a pleasant concert she can give in that parlour of a Saturday evening, to a lad who listens with all his soul—with tears sometimes in his great eyes—with crowding fancies filling his brain and throbbing at his heart, as the artist plies her humble instrument. She plays the music of Handel and Haydn, and the little chamber swells to a Cathedral, and he who listens, beholds altars lighted, priests ministering, fair children swinging censers, great oriel windows gleaming in sunset, and seen through arched columns and avenues of twilight marble. The young fellow who hears her has been often and often to the Opera and Theatres. As she plays Don Juan, Zerlina comes tripping over the meadows, and Masetto after her, with a crowd of peasant maidens, and they sing the sweetest of all music, and the heart beats with happiness, and kindness, and pleasure. Piano, pianissimo ! the city is hushed. The towers of the great Cathedral rise in the distance, its spires lighted

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by the rising moon. The statues in the moonlit-place cast long shadows athwart the pavement ; but the fountain in the midst is dressed out like Cinderella for the night, and sings and wears a crest of diamonds. . . . And see, on his cream-coloured charger, Masaniello prances in, and Fra Diavolo leads down the balcony, carbine in hand ; and Sir Huon of Bordeaux sails up to the quay with the Sultan's daughter of Babylon. All these delights and sights, and joys and glories, these tributes of sympathy, movements of unknown longing, and visions of beauty, a young sickly lad of eighteen enjoys in a little dark room, where there is a bed disguised in the shape of a wardrobe, and a little old woman is playing under a gas lamp on the jingling keys of an old piano."

(The Newcomes.)

The afternoon soon slipped away, in the manner above recorded—club-talk, desultory writing, short walks with or visits to some dear and intimate friend. There were, as may be imagined, many who were lifelong associates, able to appreciate "the affectionate nature, the cheerful companionship, the large heart and the open hand, the simple courteous-

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ness, the enduring frankness of a brave, true, honest gentleman." (*Punch*).

But Thackeray, on being asked by one of his daughters which of all his friends was best beloved, replied, "Why, dear old Fitz, of course, and Brookfield." Fitz—Edward Fitzgerald, of "Omar Khayyam" renown—fully reciprocated this affection, being a devoted admirer of the "gray, grand, good-humoured" giant. As for the Rev. Charles Brookfield and Mrs. Brookfield, they were almost like brother and sister to him. "They took me in, they pitied me, they gave me kindly words of cheer." And to mention his other most notable friends would be to name the most famous men of the period—Alfred Tennyson, Richard Monckton Milnes, Frederick Locker Lampson, Tom Taylor, Carlyle, Macaulay, Charles Lever, Hallam, Kinglake, Millais—the list is practically endless.

With the arrival of evening, the novelist went home to dress for dining-out, which, it must be owned, was probably of all others his favourite occupation. His healthy human appetite for food, from beans-and-bacon to turtle and champagne, was paralleled by an

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almost childish pleasure in being lionised. He affected to despise the adoration of himself and his work; but it is certain that society, popularity, and applause, were a stimulant to the novelist—a stimulant increasingly necessary to him. Not only from the craftsman's point of view; for, as he said, "A social painter must be of the world he depicts, and native to the manners he portrays. . . . If I don't go out into society, I can't write." If merely as the reaction from his long obscurity and makeshift existence, he enjoyed himself in what a late lamented English composer used to term, with bated breath, "The 'Ouses of the Great." The coruscating conversation, the scintillating lights, the women and high-bred men, the flavour of ease and opulence, and the pride of the eye—all these things created an atmosphere in which he spread and flourished exceedingly. And there was now hardly any aristocratic dinner party complete without him, or any society drawing-room where he was not a *persona grata*.

Thackeray was a notoriously bad public speaker. He could go on with eloquent ease for about three minutes, and would then—

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suddenly, unexpectedly, irretrievably—break down, with so complete a collapse that he made no attempt to recapture his scattered periods, but would sit down with a face of comic despair. The lectures at Willis's rooms, which caused such gratification to his hearers, threw him into paroxysms of nervous misery; though no one would have guessed this from the simple grace and ease of his delivery, and from the quiet humour and pathos expressed by his soft, sonorous voice. But in the club, the *salon*, or at the merry dinner-party, he was completely himself; and his *bon mots* flowed in a flashing torrent. "The best talker I ever listened to," as Dean Hole puts it, one who "said so many good things that they trod down and suffocated each other." He was careful not to sharpen his wits upon personalities. He was "reticent in expressing his opinion upon people whom he did not like, and very rarely said ill-natured things about anyone"; though, once in a while, under the pains of a chronic complaint, an abrupt unintentional *brusquerie* invaded his kindly manner. And if Charlotte Brontë professed herself worried by his "mocking tongue," she was equally distressed by the sight of his hearty consumption of

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meals; until at last, to quote his own words, "As I took my fifth potato, she leaned across, with clasped hands and tearful eyes, and breathed imploringly, 'Oh, Mr. Thackeray! Don't!'" As for the "mocking tongue;" though some folks quailed under his satirical severity, others found no trace of it; to John Hollingshead, for instance, all that he saw of Thackeray—"impressed me with his gentleness and charity. Far from being a cynic, he was more like a good-natured schoolboy."

Still, there is no doubt that he "delighted," to quote Locker Lampson, "in luxuriously-furnished and well-lighted rooms, good music, excellent wines and cookery, exhilarating talk, gay and airy gossip." He loved the sound, and colour, and odour, and light of life under these circumstances; and hence, some folk who had winced under his castigating lash as snobs, made shift to raise a feeble hoot of "*Snob!*" after that quiet, simple figure. But his own definitions remained unchanged, and himself imperturbable.

"A society," said he, "that sets up to be polite, and ignores Art and Letters, I hold to be a snobbish society. You, who despise your neighbour, are a snob; you, who forget your

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friends, meanly to follow after those of higher degree, are a snob; you, who are ashamed of your poverty, or blush for your calling, are a snob; as you who boast of your pedigree and are proud of your wealth."

(*The Snobs of England.*)

And he was no idolator of wealth, as wealth; or of rank, as rank; something of more permanent worth must accompany these distinctions, to give them value in his eyes.

"People there are living and flourishing in the world . . . with no revenue except for prosperity, and no eye except for success—faithless, hopeless, charityless. Let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main," he wrote in *Vanity Fair*. But he emphasised a point which might have otherwise been left long unnoticed:—

"Try to frequent the company of your betters. In books and life, that is the most wholesome society. . . . Learn to admire rightly; the great pleasure of life is that. Note what the great men admired; they admired great things; narrow spirits admire basely and worship meanly."

(*English Humorists.*)

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The moon was high above Kensington Gardens as Thackeray drove home. It was already past midnight; the sounds of Vanity Fair were growing hushed, and its lighted windows becoming darkened. That pensive and wistful habit of thought which underlay his surface vivacity, gradually gained the upper hand. In his own words:

“A man with a reflective turn of mind, walking through an exhibition of this sort, will not be oppressed, I take it, by his own or other people’s hilarity. . . . When you come home, you sit down, in a sober, contemplative, not uncharitable frame of mind.”
(*Vanity Fair.*)

And it was in this “sober, contemplative” spirit that he entered his bedroom, and, sinking heavily into an easy-chair, glanced at the engraving of Dürer’s “St. George and the Dragon,” which he had hung near the head of his bed, where he might see it every evening to remind him that “We all have our dragons to fight.” He remained lost in thought, too weary to undress; and the burden of his calling pressed upon him with new weight as he looked back over a

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day's work which did not wholly satisfy his fastidious requirements.

“What an awful responsibility,” he thought, “hanging over a writer! What man, holding such a place, and knowing that his words go forth to vast congregations of mankind—to grown folks, to their children, and perhaps to their children's children—but must think of his calling with a solemn and a humble heart. May love and truth guide such a man always! It is our awful prayer, and may Heaven further its fulfilment.”

(Mr. Brown's Letters.)

And, lastly, a more intimate, personal note supervened. A tender vision crossed his drowsy eyes, filling them with the ever-ready tears; as the lines of his own favourite ballad took almost tangible shape in the still shadows:—

“When the candles burn low, and the
company's gone,
In the silence of night as I sit here alone—
I sit here alone, but we yet are a pair—
My *Fanny* I see in my cane-bottomed chair.

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She comes from the past—she re-visits my
room—

She looks as she did then, all beauty and
bloom ;—

So smiling and tender, so fresh and so fair—
And yonder she sits in my cane-bottomed
chair.”



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